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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to facilitate the continuation of the steering committee at Hopkinsville Middle School after the Teacher Corps Project is completed. It was the general consensus of teachers and administrators that the committee served a valuable function in developing and implementing successful inservice programs. A report is given on the results of a faculty questionnaire designed to assess teachers' attitudes toward the function of the committee. Suggestions are made on critical things to remember in encouraging the development and use of the steering committee concept. (JD)

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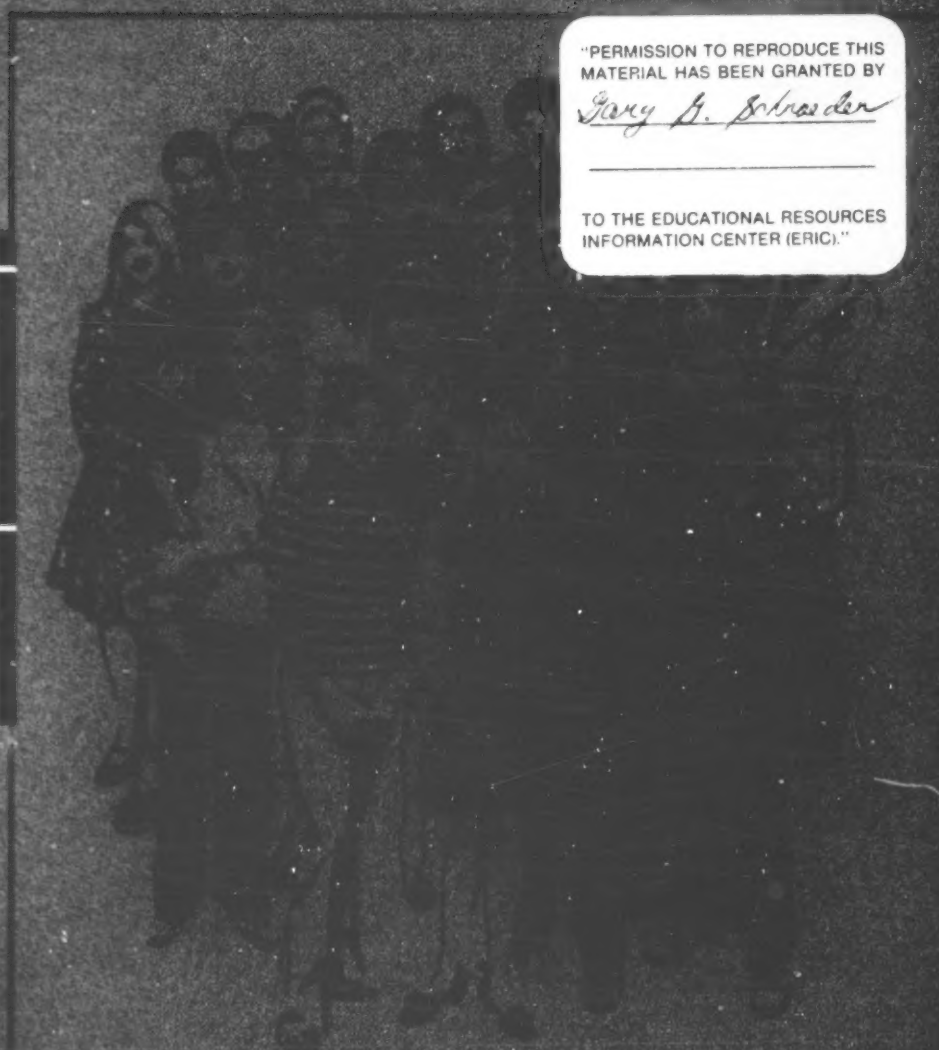

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The Stevens Connection

THE STEERING COMMITTEE: ITS ROLE AND FUNCTION IN THE MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY/HOPKINSVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL RESPONSIVE INSERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

By

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Murray State University Teacher Corps Project
Occasional Paper Series
No. 6

Murray State University
Murray, Kentucky 42071

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This publication is part of a series of occasional papers and books written by Teacher Corps staff members and teachers in an attempt to share some of the experiences gained in the Tenth Cycle Murray State University/Hopkinsville Middle School Teacher Corps Project during the 1975-77 school year. Below is a listing of titles of the total series. Copies are available upon request from the Teacher Corps Project Director, Murray State University, Murray, Ky., 42071.

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2. Parents' Guide...To Maximizing Your Child's Talents (17 pages)	.50
3. Every Child Is Gifted...A Resource Guide to Multi-Talent Activities for Teachers Based Upon Experience With Middle School Students (190 pages)	5.00
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6. Teaming In Social Studies in Talent Education
7. The First Time I Ever Won Anything: Reading Improvement
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THE STEERING COMMITTEE: ITS ROLE AND FUNCTION IN MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY/ HOPKINSVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL RESPONSIVE INSERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Hopkinsville Middle School Steering Committee was established in September of 1976 as the official decision-making body for the inservice education component of the Murray State University/Hopkinsville Middle School Teacher Corps Project. The purpose of the steering committee was to establish a communications link between the various participants in the Teacher Corps project and serve as a medium through which to solve many of the problems that arose as teachers, professors, administrators and Teacher Corps staff members all learned to function together in a complex project. Prior to the establishment of the steering committee, there had been many misunderstandings and conflicts due to a wide variety of differing points of view on critical issues, cliques within the project, and just plain lack of opportunities to sit down together to thrash things out.

In the beginning, the steering committee served as primarily a grievance committee. Most of the meetings were spent responding to conflict situations and deciding on equitable solutions. The level of trust between steering committee members was not high, and members felt it necessary to jealously guard their own interests. Members typically came to meetings, in the early days, expecting a fight. An observer of the steering committee, at that time, might have commented that this was a group that "certainly had lots of problems."

A change in attitude among steering committee members began to be noticed as the leadership worked very hard to follow through on the decisions of the steering committee and see that answers to questions were available by the next meeting. As participants found that their meetings

actually seemed to resolve conflict, the expectation for conflict began to decrease. In fact, as conflict decreased, the expectation that conflict would be resolved through normal procedures increased, and the curious phenomenon of a sudden decrease in the amount of steering committee business was noticed.

At this point, the steering committee began the transition to being more of a planning and forecasting body. The steering committee meetings were as often used to look at the inservice program in a constructive manner as they had been to consider repetitive problems. And, especially as the end of the Teacher Corps Project approached, the steering committee began to look more and more to its role as a school-wide committee dealing with both matters of curriculum and professional growth.

The purpose of this paper is to facilitate the continuation of the steering committee at Hopkinsville Middle School after the Teacher Corps Project is gone. It is the convictions of the leadership of the steering committee that the concept of the steering committee is a sound one, and that the steering committee can make an effective contribution to Hopkinsville Middle School through the encouragement of school wide self-renewal and continual curriculum improvement. Our assessment of teacher attitude concerning the steering committee leads us to believe that the faculty, on the whole, is quite positive to the idea of a steering committee. In this paper, we will report on the results of a faculty questionnaire as well as suggest some critical things to remember in encouraging the development and use of the steering committee concept.

A Faculty Questionnaire Concerning the Function and Value of The Steering Committee

During the week of May 2-6 a questionnaire assessing the "role and effectiveness" of the steering commitee, as it had functioned during the two years of the Teacher Corps Project (1975-77), was administered to the faculty of Hopkinsville Middle School. In the questionnaire, we attempted to plumb the teachers' feelings about the following topics: a) Did the teachers feel that the steering committee had been effective as a decision-making and trouble-shooting body? b) Did the teachers feel that it would be worthwhile to continue the steering committee after the ending of the Teacher Corps grant? c) What did teachers see to be some of the key issues to be considered in thinking about a steering committee for Hopkinsville Middle School?

The results of the questionnaire are summarized in appendix A following the body of this paper. However, some particularly interesting findings resulted from the questionnaire.

First, on questions dealing with the effectiveness of the steering committee in decision-making and problem-solving during the Teacher Corps Project, seventy-five percent of the teachers responding felt that the steering committee had been effective.

Second, when asked whether or not they felt that the steering committee could be an effective decision making body for Hopkinsville Middle School in the future, eighty-three percent of the teachers responded affirmatively, and between seventy and seventy-nine percent of the teachers liked the steering committee idea and felt that the steering committee could work at Hopkinsville Middle School.

Third, eighty percent of the teachers responding felt that the steering committee was a better way to make decisions than through holding large faculty meetings.

Although other results of the questionnaire were more mixed, it seems as if the preponderance of teachers feel quite favorably towards the steering committee. Some statements like, "I think that the form that we have used for the steering committee is quite satisfactory" produced more ambiguous replies. On this question, for example, forty-seven percent of the teachers were positive, thirty-seven percent of the teachers were uncertain, and sixteen percent were negative. It is felt that this sort of response reflects both the newness of the steering committee concept at Hopkinsville Middle School and the close association of the steering committee with the Teacher Corps Project. Teachers feel that the steering committee is a good idea, but they recognize that the form and purpose fo the committee could go in any number of directions after the ending of the Teacher Corps Project. There is some concern about whether the administration of the school takes the steering committee seriously, and also some concern about whether teachers would support the steering committee when all of the time and effort needed to make the steering committee viable would need to be voluntary and above the regular load of the teachers.

In a sense, the concept of the steering committee stands at a cross-roads at Hopkinsville Middle School. There is a strong feeling of success associated with the steering committee, but also a certain amount of "looking over the shoulder" and wondering about whether we can really pull it off. What is needed, in the minds of the steering committee leadership,

is to continue the steering committee without the Teacher Corps Project, to have success with it, and to convince all of the teachers and staff at Hopkinsville Middle School that the idea is workable, valuable, and is nedded by the school in general. This, it is felt, can be done, if what has been learned from the experience of Teacher Corps is utilized. To capitalize on the experience of past steering committee members, each past member was asked to list critical issues in the operation of a steering committee. The results of this questioning are listed in full in Appendix B following the body of the report. Some of the main issues are summarized below.

Critical Issues for Hopkinsville Middle School Steering Committe

First, a number of the past members of the steering committee felt it important to emphasize again that the majority of the teachers at the middle school must support the idea of continuing the steering committee. Thus, even though difficulties may be encountered in the beginning stages of utilizing the steering committee concept, a basic reservoir of support among the faculty ought to be relied on to "get us over the rough spots."

Second, teachers are strong in their feeling that there must be perceived support from the administration. It is not that the past members of the steering committee expect that the administration will not support the steering commitee, but rather that they recognize the tremendous influence held by the adminstration on the life of the school. Hopkinsville Middle School is a school that trusts and respects its adminstration, and any new idea must have adminstration support to succeed.

Third, the past members recognize that if the steering committee is to prosper, it cannot be the responsibility of a small group of teachers. The faculty of Hopkinsville Middle School is such that work must be shared by a wide-ranging group of teachers if it is to be a representative body. Also, because all teachers are very busy, it is unlikely that any small group of teachers will be willing to commit major blocks of time to an undertaking that they perceive to lack overall faculty support.

Fourth, the steering committee is seen to require a tangible impact on the faculty. There must <u>really be</u> communication with and from the faculty. The committee must really meet to plan and act. If there is no impact, then enthusiasm will probably wane.

Finally, it is seen as critical that the steering committee have a part in the planning of the program at Hopkinsville Middle School. The committee must avoid being merely a probelm solving body, and take the initiative to become involved in looking ahead and working with the administration to set direction, create new ideas, and forecast impending requirements on the curriculum. Time should be set aside at a faculty meeting near the beginning of each semester to discuss directions for the steering committee. This is important to ensure that the steering committee continue to work positively in planning curriculum and school programs. This is especially important in the early stages of the life of the steering committee so that a pattern of reaction to problems is not established as the primary responsibility for the committee.

Suggested Procedures For the Continued Operation of the Steering Committee

Recognizing that it is important that some basic procedures be established for the continued operation of the steering committee, the last meeting of the steering committee during the operation of the Teacher Corps Project was spent generating a basic list of necessary procedures.

First, the steering committee must be seen as a representative. Most of the activity should be initiated by the const'tuent members of the various subject matter teams.

Second, the steering committee should be a body that suggests specific actions. Steering committee members should stimulate discussion on issues among their subject matter team colleagues. The steering committee should act as a body to consider faculty opinion, and as a body which can arrive at concensus decisions quickly. These decisions would then be shared with the faculty which would make the final decision as to action.

Third, the polling procedure whereby steering committee representatives interact with constituents needs to be practiced. Because the steering committee is basically a group to facilitate communication and decision making, it is very important that steering committee representatives work hard at getting back to their teams, polling each member, summarizing teacher feelings, and being prepared to report accurately to the steering committee as a whole.

Fourth, the steering committee should meet formally with the principal at least once a month. Although the steering committee serves primarily as a group where teachers can voice their feelings, the steering committee cannot be allowed to function by itself if it is to have any impact on the life of the middle school. There needs to be effective and on-going

interaction between the steering committee and the principal.

Fifth, the steering committee should set planning goals on a semester basis.

Form of the Steering Committee

The steering committee will include members from each of the subject areas - Science, Math, Social Studies, English, Physical Education, Health, Remedial Courses, Exploratory - and a member of the administration. Each member will serve for a period of three months and the membership will rotate in a staggered fashion. It is hoped that all faculty members will have the opportunity to serve on the committee.

Terms will run as follows:

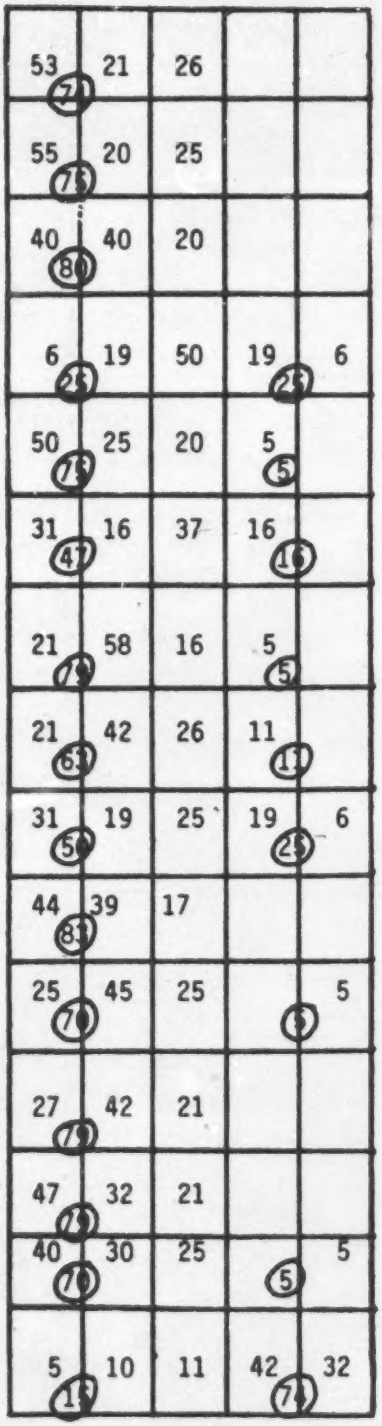
Math	September	December	March
Science	October	January	April
Social Studies	November	February	May
English	October	January	April
Exploratory	November	February	May
Remedial Reading/Math	December	March	September
Administration	November	February	May
P.E. and Health	December	March	September
	January	April	October

Chairmanship will be on a semester basis and will be as follows:

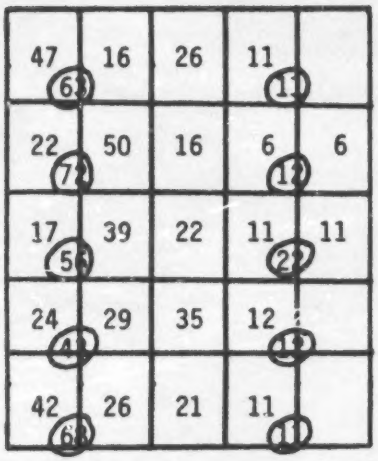
1) September - December 2) January - May

APPENDIX A

A QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE



1. I feel that the steering committee has been useful in solving many of the problems encountered in the Teacher Corps Project.
2. I feel that the steering committee provides a genuine vehicle for teachers to be a part of the decision making process in the Teacher Corps Project.
3. I feel that the steering committee has been a better way to make decisions than having regular faculty meetings.
4. I feel that I have influenced the directions of the project through my participation or representation on the steering committee.
5. I think that projects like the Teacher Corps Project should have a steering committee.
6. I think that the from that we have used for the steering committee is quite satisfactory.
7. I think that the steering committee, in the time that it has been in operation, has had a beneficial effect on the school as a whole.
8. I think that the steering committee has created a closer sense of community at HMS.
9. I think that participation in the steering committee has helped us to know each other better.
10. I think that the steering committee could be an effective decision-making body at HMS.
11. I think that the steering committee has been a good way for the teachers to communicate with the administration of HMS.
12. I think that the steering committee would be a good way for the teachers to come together for generating new ideas for the school.
13. I like the idea of a steering committee.
14. I think that a steering committee could work and be valuable at HMS next year.
15. I think that a steering committee might become a nit-picking organization, causing some problems for the school.



16. I think that a steering committee would be a good go-between between the teachers and the principal.

17. I think that the steering committee has influenced decision-making at HMS.

18. I think that the administration takes the steering committee seriously.

19. I think that the teachers have supported the steering committee.

20. I think that there should be a steering committee at HMS next year.

APPENDIX B

The Role and Effectiveness of the Steering Committee

List 5 items you feel are critical for the maintenance and functioning of the steering committee.

# of responses	
3	- Rotating membership of the committee
	- Back-up of regular whole faculty meetings
	- Concept of steering committee as a cooperative and supportive body rather than a grievance committee
	- Favorable acceptance of the role of the committee by administration
4	- Simple and clear feed-back from the steering committee to the entire faculty
5	- A desire of the majority of the faculty to have a steering committee
5	- A willingness on the part of the administration to cooperate with a steering committee
	- A chairperson who would be as conscientious as the previous two chairpersons.
	- All departments (including adminstration) represented
2	- Guidelines for role of committee
2	- Provision of satisfactory meeting time
	- Regular meetings
2	- Take part in planning school's program
	- Outspoken, contributing members
	- A chairman with whom the faculty communicates well. A good strong leader
	- Members on the committee who can relate well to all their team members.
	- Teams be divided so team discussion can be easily done. (Same quad, same planning period or some other workable arrangement)
	- Good follow-up
	- Agenda limited so that it does not infringe upon the authority of adminstrators, supervisors, counselors, or individual teachers.